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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS TO USAID AND OFDA

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SUBJECT: NORTHERN UGANDA NOTES (JULY 12-31, 2008)

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11. (U) Summary: The following Northern Uganda Notes provide information on the situation on the ground and USG activities aimed at meeting Mission's objectives in northern Uganda. These objectives include promoting regional stability through peace and security, good governance, access to social services, economic growth, and humanitarian assistance. Post appreciates feedback from consumers on the utility of this product and any gaps in information that need to be filled. End Summary.

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION PROCESSES

12. (U) There were no indications that the Lord's Resistance leader Joseph Kony will sign the final peace agreement. On

July 22, South Sudan President Salva Kiir met with President Museveni to discuss border security and the LRA. Kiir dispelled media reports that the South Sudan government had asked the Uganda military to pull out of its territory. Kiir said his government remained in favor of a peaceful solution to the northern conflict. The Uganda Government peace team is waiting for a report from UN envoy Special Envoy Joachim Chissano and the Chief Mediator, South Sudan's Vice President on when Kony is expected to sign the final agreement.

13. (U) On July 30, James Obita, former leader of the LRA delegation to the Juba peace talks applied for amnesty with the Uganda Amnesty Commission. Obita was dismissed as head of the LRA delegation in June. In an interview, he claimed he was not fired, but that when the peace negotiating team's mandate ended, the team ceased to exist.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY

14. (U) A recent Action Contre La Faim's (ACF) nutrition survey in Gulu and Amuru Districts shows 1.4 percent increase of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) and 8.7 percent increase of Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM). The last nutritional survey conducted in Gulu and Amuru districts by ACF in May, 2007, revealed SAM of 0.4 percent and GAM of 3.1 percent. Lacor St. Mary's Hospital in Gulu also reported 1,000 cases of severe acute malnutrition since April this year. The increase in malnutrition might be caused by a variety of factors as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) return, the decrease in food security as they become more reliant on their own production, increase in diarrhea disease due to decreased access to potable water, poor sanitation and access to healthcare. A similar trend was seen in Lango region last year as IDPs returned to their

homes from camps.

¶5. (U) All districts in the Acholi sub-region have now established Camp Phase Out Committees and have begun the process of assessing conditions to recommend closure and/or interventions to help make a camp a sustainable community. Across the region, IDP returnees continue to gradually increase in number. Of the 1.1 million people living in IDP camps in the Acholi region at the end of 2005, 24 percent had returned to their homes at the end of June 2008.

¶6. (U) Heads of UN Agencies, development partners and GOU local officials met in Gulu to discuss relief to development transition, PRDP implementation, and monitoring. Discussions highlighted a critical need for camp closure guidelines and consistent guidance on rights of both landowners and IDPs. Discussions also focused on expectations for the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP), and the need for coordination, monitoring and oversight at both central and district levels. At the community level, few citizens understand or even know about the PRDP.

¶7. (U) USG Activities: USAID/Food For Peace (FFP) contributed 12 million USD to World Food Program (WFP). As with previous contributions this year, FFP is continuing to earmark within WFP's Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) to ensure that contributions target areas of strategic interest to USAID/Uganda. This includes Karamoja and IDPs.

¶8. (U) USAID/Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) provided 900,000 USD to UNICEF to augment Hepatitis E response in northern Uganda. WHO reported over 5,700 cases and 100 deaths since the outbreak began in Kitgum District in November 2007. The outbreak has now spread to neighboring districts. In addition to the UNICEF contribution, OFDA has extended three water/sanitation agreements in Kitgum and Pader totaling about 3.5 million USD. Meanwhile, on July

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31, the GOU announced an emergency plan to fight the epidemic which will cost six million USD (ten billion shillings).

¶9. (U) USAID/Office of Transitional Initiatives (OTI) Northern Uganda Transition Initiative NUTI program approved three new grants in July totaling approximately 215,000 USD. The first, to the Internews Network will help strengthen the capacity of key radio stations throughout northern Uganda to increase citizen exposure to quality and timely information. The second grant will renovate and furnish the administrative offices in Odek sub-county, Gulu District. The office building deteriorated to such a degree during the LRA conflict, that it is no longer functional. The renovation will help deliver essential government services to people in the sub-county and will act as a visible sign to citizens that stability is returning to the region. The third grant will fund a hand-over ceremony officially ending the role of IDP camp commanders, giving way to the normal Local Council (LC) government system in place in the rest of the country. The ceremony is symbolic of the GOU's new role in the development of northern Uganda. Musicians and dancers will perform, speeches will be given by area leaders, and token gifts of appreciation will be distributed to camp commanders for their volunteer work during the war.

¶10. (U) In addition, USAID/OTI launched the first small grant to the Lalogi Farmers' Forum in conjunction with local government. Plows and other farm equipment were provided to the Forum to help returning households open land. The farm equipment was identified as a need in the joint government/UN camp phase-out assessment.

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SECURITY UPDATE
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¶11. (U) UN agencies could not verify rumors of alleged movements of LRA elements at the borders with Sudan. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the north were advised to maintain their operations as usual.

¶12. (U) A group of about 30 rebels were reported to be in the proximity of Kajo Keji while a second group of about 40 were

reported in the western parts on southern Sudan near Yei. The second group scattered into four smaller groups after a rebel was shot and killed during contact with Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA). During these movements, two Sudanese civilians were abducted in Kajo Keji.

¶13. (U) On July 11, Fourth Division Commander Brigadier Charles Otema announced that the UPDF will withdraw its troops from IDP camp detachments in the north at the end of July. The move is aimed at enabling the Uganda Police Force to effectively keep law and order in the communities. Meanwhile, on July 14, the police started a door-to-door community policing exercise in Gulu District.

¶14. (U) The Minister for Disaster Preparedness and Refugees Tarsis Kabwegyere reported that the Humanitarian Demining Department in the Office of the Prime Minister had destroyed a total of 15,214 items of unexploded ordnance and 20 land mines since 2006. He told the Parliamentary Committee on Presidential Affairs that 321 pieces of explosives ordnance were yet to be destroyed. The affected districts include Pader, Kitgum, Gulu, Amuru, Soroti, Oyam, Bundibugyo and Kasese. Meanwhile, some IDPs are reportedly hesitant to leave camps for fear of mines in their fields.

¶15. (U) On July 22, military chiefs from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan and Uganda met in Entebbe to discuss the way forward in dealing with negative forces in the region. Uganda's Army Commander Major General Aronda Nyakairima reported that an earlier meeting in June, LRA rebels had continued to recruit, kill and amass wealth. He urged the regional governments to take military action instead of talking about eradicating the negative forces.

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FROM THE MEDIA AND THE WEB
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¶16. (U) The U.S. based Human Rights Watch (HRW) reportedly urged the International Criminal Court (ICC) to include members of the Uganda Peoples' Defense Force (UPDF) on its list of those who should be investigated for the commission of atrocities in the north. In a July report, HRW stated the omission of the UPDF from the list gave credence to reports by politicians and organizations that the ICC was biased indicting the top LRA rebel leaders. UPDF's acting spokesperson Major Chris Magezi said the call should be ignored. He

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said anybody with evidence against the UPDF should direct it to the government investigative agencies.

¶17. (U) The media reported that LRA faced an imminent split. One group believes that the signing of the peace deal should be delayed until the Chief Mediator provides some clarifications and assurances. The other group fears that the continued delay could endanger the ceasefire and the peace agreement.

¶18. (U) On July 21, IRIN's PLUSNEWS highlighted a report by the Gulu Save the Children Organization (GUSCO) and the Acholi Community Empowerment Network, which found acute poverty was forcing girls as young as 14 years into early marriage and prostitution in parts of northern Uganda affected by the war. According to the report, a combination of extreme poverty, a large number of child-headed households, and the high mobility of internally displaced families were among the factors that have led to girls being subjected to sexual abuse or engaging in prostitution. The study found that the perpetrators of child prostitution included aid workers, businessmen, farmers, teachers, relatives, and armed personnel such as members of the LRA and the UPDF. The researchers found that raising awareness of child prostitution and HIV had contributed to the recent increase in the reporting of the crimes, which are traditionally underreported. GUSCO's program officer pointed out a gap between reported cases and those that made it to the courts. "Few cases reach the judge," he said. "There are a variety of reasons for this, including parents using the reported case as an opportunity to extort money from perpetrators."

¶19. (U) On July 27, security officials in Gulu arrested three

civilians who were masquerading as LRA brigadiers, namely, Collins Otunu aka Lalango, Charles Kibwola aka Brigadier Abudema, Onen Ngora Walter aka Captain Matata. UPDF's fourth Division Spokesperson Ronald Kakurungu confirmed the arrests saying the trio was posing as LRA defectors.

BROWNING